

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTERIM REPORT ON ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE ON CERTIFICATION AND LICENSING OF TRANSITIONING MILITARY PERSONNEL

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BACKGROUND

In recent years there has been an increased reliance on certification and licensure as a primary form of recognition of competency in job-related skills and knowledge. Private sector employers, federal, state and local government agencies, professional associations, unions and the general public have turned to credentialing to regulate entry into occupations and to promote safety, professionalism, and career growth. The amount of private sector credentialing has grown tremendously in recent years, and hundreds of professional and trade associations presently offer certification in their specific fields. The past few years have shown a similar increase in occupational regulation by both the state and federal governments. As a result, over the past decade, the number of both mandatory and optional credentialing programs has increased steadily.

The potential barriers to employment that the increase in civilian credentialing presents to transitioning military personnel have been documented in recent years in two key studies -- one conducted by the Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance (Transition Commission) and another conducted by the American Legion, under a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.

The Transition Commission study identified those civilian equivalents of military occupational specialties that are licensed or certified in the civilian workforce, and the number of individuals leaving the service in FY 97 in those occupations. The intent of the study was to determine the approximate number of individuals who might face barriers related to certification and licensure upon leaving the service. The study revealed that, overall, 38 percent of the 215,000 enlisted transitioning service members in FY 97 were in occupations affected by licensure and certification. The proportions (and numbers) by branch of services are:

- Air Force -- 46 percent (18,127);
- Navy -- 42 percent (28,525);
- Army -- 37 percent (26,163); and
- Marine Corps -- 25 percent (9,620).¹

As these figures reveal, there is a significant proportion of service members who are faced with the task of gaining credentials if they choose to pursue an equivalent occupation in the civilian sector.

¹ The proportions in each service were based on the total number of military personnel who transitioned from each branch in FY 97 *excluding* a small proportion of personnel whose credentialing status was unknown because the occupational specialty was not available. The proportion of "unknowns" ranged from .28 percent of total departing enlisted personnel in the Navy to 3.5 percent in the Army.

In response to the findings of these studies, the Interagency Task Force on Certification and Licensing of Transitioning Military Personnel (subsequently referred to as the Task Force) was formed through a joint effort by the Department of Labor/Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DoL/VETS) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The Deputy Secretaries of these agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formally establishing the Task Force on April 24, 1998.

The formation of the Task Force and the strength of agency representation at each meeting reveal that the credentialing issue for transitioning military personnel is an important one for the Federal Government. All agencies that attended the initial meetings recognized the importance of the issue, and to their agencies, and set in motion a process of identifying the most appropriate personnel to represent their agencies on the Task Force. This commitment of personnel resources to a cross-agency committee reflects the concern from both the defense and the civilian sectors regarding this issue.

An immediate result of the formation of this group is that the most important actors at the federal level have come together to create a common dialogue for the first time. Furthermore, the Task Force has accomplished more than the establishment of an information exchange function. Rather, it has stimulated an intensive dialogue that has provided the participants with a comprehensive grasp of the challenges inherent in this issue, and has led to their common commitment to develop strategies to address these challenges. In less than six months, agencies that once worked against each other are now cooperating and developing solutions.

The mission of the Task Force is to serve as a catalyst for obtaining recognition of military training and experience by civilian credentialing boards. Federal certification and licensure requirements, as well as barriers to employment in federal government agencies, represent the primary focus of the Task Force. A secondary focus has been to assist in the advancement of several DoL/VETS initiatives related to credentialing of current and former military personnel at the state level and in the private sector.

SUMMARY OF TASK FORCE ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

In the course of five monthly meetings since June 1998, the Task Force has devoted itself to identifying the existing barriers to certification and licensure for transitioning military personnel. Concurrently, the Task Force also has developed a set of plans and proposals for future activities that the Task Force believes will improve the process of credentialing transitioning members.

A fundamental accomplishment of the Task Force has been the establishment of an active network of federal officials whose professional responsibilities relate, in various ways, to the credentialing of current and former military personnel. The most general dimension of this networking experience has been the lively dialogue that has emerged between those agencies in the

defense sector, on the one hand, and those agencies in the civilian sector, on the other. The more specific dimensions have involved the establishment of direct linkages between designated contact persons in a number of federal agencies.

This Interim Report describes the following activities and accomplishments of the Task Force:

- Documentation of existing efforts;
- Identification of barriers to certification, licensure, and credentialing;
- Establishment of new interfaces as a result of Task Force meetings;
- Development of plans for activities to be undertaken by the Task Force and its member agencies;
- Formulation of proposals for future activities that require outside authorization and/or cooperation.

DOCUMENTATION OF EXISTING EFFORTS DISCOVERED BY THE TASK FORCE

The Task Force discovered that a number of interfaces and efforts already were underway among various agencies and organizations to address credentialing issues prior to the creation of the Task Force. These include:

- Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) with Military--FAA licenses pilots in each of the branches.
- Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Army--Army implements a pilot program at Ft. Eustis on Commercial Drivers License (CDL).
- Coast Guard and Army--Army conducts a training program at Ft. Eustis offering classes toward the Merchant Marine License.
- Department of Labor/Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (DoL/BAT) and Military Branches--DoL/BAT provides consultative and technical assistance to military-based apprenticeship programs.
- Military Sealift Command (MSC) and Coast Guard--MSC employs civil service members who are required to be certified and/or licensed by the Coast Guard before employment.
- Military-Based Efforts to Address Credentialing Barriers include:
 - Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Services (DANTES),
 - Navy and Marine Corps National Apprenticeship Programs,
 - Community College of the Air Force,
 - Voluntary education programs within each branch, and
 - Policy oversight on accreditation, certification and licensure by Department of Defense/Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

The Task Force also learned about other initiatives that are being undertaken by federal agencies that address issues related to certification and licensure. While some may not be specific to current and

former military personnel, the Task Force deemed them relevant to the overall effort to reduce barriers to credentialing. These are listed below, by sponsoring federal agency.

Department of Labor/Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DoL/VETS)

DoL/VETS has a number of initiatives underway or recently completed, outside of the Task Force, to address credentialing barriers for current and former military personnel. They include:

- ***Website Project.*** This initiative will provide current information on federal and state credentialing requirements and data unique to the needs of current and former military personnel. This website will integrate existing databases and webpages related to credentialing. For a limited set of occupations, it also will serve as a resource for determining the gap between the training and experience that the service member has, and what he or she requires to gain certification or licensure in the equivalent civilian occupation.
- ***State Pilot on Worker Credentialing of Current and Former Military Personnel.*** Five states have selected specific occupations and will work with state credentialing bodies and the military services to identify ways to improve the ability of current and former military personnel to move into those selected occupations.
- ***Microsoft Skills 2000 Initiative.*** This initiative alerts transitioning military personnel to the options available in the computer field and provides related training. Upon completion of this training program, individuals will be certified in Microsoft computer applications, enabling them to obtain employment in five different fields.
- ***Communications Workers of America Initiative.*** The CWA has created a website which allows military personnel with a communications background to move more quickly into the growing telecommunications industry, which is currently in need of highly skilled and qualified workers.

National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC)

Partnering with State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees (SOICCs), NOICC developed the Licensed Occupation Information System (LOIS), an Internet accessible database of state licensure requirements.

National Skill Standards Board (NSSB)

Establishing a national system of voluntary skill standards for approximately 98 percent of all existing occupations in the U.S.

Occupational Information Network (ONET)

Sponsored by DoL/Employment and Training Administration, ONET is a comprehensive database system for collecting, organizing, and disseminating data on job characteristics and worker attributes. ONET replaces the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT).

Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

DHHS is currently developing a centralized database of credentialed healthcare workers at VA hospitals.

IDENTIFICATION OF BARRIERS TO CERTIFICATION, LICENSURE, AND CREDENTIALING

Recognizing that there are a number of factors that have an impact on the ability of current and former military personnel to obtain civilian credentials, the Task Force identified the following barriers. These barriers encompass a wide variety of issues:

- Department of Defense (DoD) perceptions regarding the effect of credentialing on retention.
- Service member lack of complete information on civilian credentialing issues:
 - Lack of awareness of civilian credentialing barriers, and
 - Lack of complete dissemination of information on credentialing resources.
- Impediments faced by military personnel seeking credentialing:
 - Geographic dispersion of military personnel/access to education and training,
 - Fees for certification/licensure examinations, and
 - Problems surrounding the use of the Montgomery GI Bill Funds in lieu of tuition assistance while still on active duty.
- Civilian credentialing boards' lack of information on military training and experience:
 - Lack of recognition of military training and experience,
 - Differing terminology and packaging of information, and
 - Lack of clarity regarding the procedures for exchange of transcripts between military and civilian credentialing boards.
- Barriers related to obtaining union membership.
- Federal government employment impediments.

NEW COOPERATIVE EFFORTS ESTABLISHED AS A RESULT OF THE TASK FORCE

In addition to solidifying existing interfaces between member agencies, the Task Force has served as a catalyst for new collaborative efforts among agencies. Some specific collaborative efforts are identified below.

Preliminary agreement between FAA and Navy/Marine Corps Apprenticeship Program

A specific outcome of the Task Force meetings has been the growing cooperation between the FAA and the National Apprenticeship Program operated by the Navy/Marine Corps. Through a dialogue between representatives from these agencies, a Memorandum of Understanding will be developed that recognizes the aircraft and power plant mechanic training received by apprentices as meeting FAA standards. This improved interface is directly attributable to the opportunities for interaction provided by the Task Force.

Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Navy/Marine Corps Apprenticeship Programs

Representatives of these two agencies are currently working together to determine whether Navy/Marine Corps apprenticeship programs might match federal employment standards for experience and training.

Creation of the Joint Military Apprenticeship Workgroup

The creation of this workgroup represents another component of the overall movement to address the barriers to transitioning military personnel. With representatives from all four military branches and DoL's Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training (BAT), this group is exploring the feasibility of the coordination of efforts by the services to create a single, nationally recognized DoD Apprenticeship program.

This Joint Workgroup will select five to seven occupations that have "joint service apprenticeship commonality" and established DoL standards. These selections will then be provided to the AFL-CIO for review by its affiliated Building and Construction Trades Union Advisory Committee. Working with the AFL-CIO, each service will provide background documentation of the selected joint apprenticeable occupational specialties. It is expected that this exchange of information will help unions to recognize the training that is provided in the military.

The establishment of this Workgroup is attributable to the efforts of the Task Force, as well as the Congressional Commission on Servicemembers and Veterans Transition Assistance. It reflects another component of the ongoing efforts to address barriers to certification and licensure.

PLANS AND PROPOSALS DEVELOPED BY THE TASK FORCE

In light of the identified barriers to credentialing and the goals and objectives of the Task Force, the Task Force has developed the following plans and proposed activities. In some instances, the plans build on existing initiatives, while in others, the plans entail new efforts on the part of the Task Force or individual agencies represented on the Task Force. Proposals are actions that may require cooperation of agencies or organizations outside of those represented on the Task Force

and/or require legislative action. Each of the plans and proposals are the result of the efforts of two working groups that were organized following the initial meeting to specifically consider solutions to the identified barriers. When the Task Force reconvenes in January 1999, the plans and proposals below will be prioritized and an implementation schedule will be developed. Working groups will be reorganized to carry out this effort.

Improve Existing Interfaces

Provide a high-level briefing to the Department of Defense and Office of Personnel Management regarding the progress of the Task Force to date. This would serve both to provide information and to establish a liaison.

Improve Military Personnel's Understanding of Credentialing and Access to Resources

- ***Assess information needs of individual service members.*** The Task Force will research what information is currently available regarding credentialing. They will identify what additional information should be disseminated in order to better prepare personnel to become credentialed.
- ***Communicate to military personnel availability of resources that support credentialing.*** As part of an overall marketing strategy, the Task Force will research ways that information can be provided to active duty personnel regarding credentialing issues. Some of the strategies include dissemination of information through: articles in base newspapers; notices printed on military pay stubs; posting on the centralized DoD website; and communicating with the Veterans Service Organizations to convey this information.
- ***Alleviate geographic barriers.*** The Task Force will work to reduce geographic barriers to training programs by promoting access to computer-based training programs and distance-learning classes.

Provide Information to Civilian Credentialing Boards

The Task Force will seek to promote the heightened awareness of credentialing bodies regarding military training and experience and the documentation of such. The Task Force will develop a plan for disseminating appropriate information to civilian credentialing boards regarding issues surrounding recognition of military training, education, and experience, as well as improving the transfer and presentation of military transcripts to civilian credentialing boards and employers.

Promote Federal Government Employment

- ***Provide information to Human Resources Officers.*** The Task Force learned that federal agencies are not completely aware of the amount and extent of occupational training that

military personnel receive while on active duty. It was determined that increased information might alleviate this barrier and lead to increased consideration of these personnel. The Task Force will contact these officials and provide them with information on the barriers that exist to federal employment, as well as the existence of this pool of highly trained and qualified individuals.

- ***Promote a better understanding of military occupational training programs by OPM.*** Because OPM serves as the central office charged with determining minimum standards for most federal positions, the Task Force will look for areas where OPM could give policy guidance regarding certain occupations in the military that are equivalent to their civilian counterparts.
- ***Support development of a crosswalk between military background checks and agency-based checks.*** The Task Force learned that all potential federal employees applying to particular sensitive positions must undergo a lengthy and costly background check before they can be hired. It was decided that the Task Force would research the feasibility of crosswalking military background checks of recent separatees to the appropriate agency in order to reduce delays to entry into federal employment.

Advocate Various Legislative Changes to the Montgomery GI Bill

- ***Permit Montgomery GI Bill use for credentialing expenses.*** The Task Force found that examination fees might pose financial difficulties for certain service members. The Montgomery GI Bill could serve as a possible funding source to alleviate this barrier.
- ***Reduce the penalty for Montgomery GI Bill for tuition assistance during active duty service.*** The Task Force learned that, while the Montgomery GI Bill can be used for tuition assistance while service members are still on active duty, the total number of months of available benefits is reduced to an amount equivalent to the number of months that the individual receives full-time training. This results in the loss of post-separation benefits that often have a higher dollar value than the in-service benefit received. Currently, individuals must choose between being fully reimbursed for fees under the Montgomery GI Bill while losing significant benefits available upon discharge, or receiving 75 percent reimbursement for tuition and fees under the DoD tuition assistance program while saving the entire Montgomery GI Bill benefit for use following discharge.
- ***Reopen a window of opportunity to service members who opted out of eligibility earlier in their tour of duty.*** The Task Force found that certain active duty personnel are not eligible for Montgomery GI Bill funds because they opted not to apply for them earlier in their service when the GI Bill benefit program was not as desirable as it is now. The Task Force suggests amending legislation to allow these individuals another opportunity to establish eligibility for these funds.

- ***Lift the 10-year deadline for use of Montgomery GI Bill Funds.*** Currently there is a 10-year deadline following discharge for use of these benefits. In conjunction with the promotion of lifelong learning, the Task Force suggests that this deadline be extended or eliminated.

Promote Communication between the Task Force and DoD's Interservice Training Review Organization (ITRO)

The Interservice Training Review Organization was established by DoD to promote collaboration among the various military branches in providing training to service members. Because many of the efforts related to reducing credentialing barriers relate to training issues, the Task Force believes that the establishment of a dialogue with ITRO can serve to promote the objectives of both entities.

SUMMARY

This interim report on the activities of the Task Force represents just the first step to reducing the barriers to credentialing by transitioning military personnel. As noted, the January 1999 Task Force meeting will focus on the implementation of the plans and proposals set forth above. A strong foundation has been created in these first meetings, and progress has been made in tackling the many complexities of this issue. In the coming months, the Task Force expects to build upon the relationships that have developed so that the implementation process will proceed smoothly. With the continued trend toward industry adoption of certification and licensure as a means of validating job readiness, the Task Force will continue to see that military personnel are provided as many resources as possible to ease the transition to civilian employment.